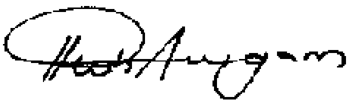
A guide to various aspects of Indian religious thought and inter-religious understanding and religious tolerance. "Its chief mark consists in concentration on the spiritual aspect, belief in the intimate relationship of philosophy and life, the inseparability of theory and practice and the insistence on intuition coexisting with the acceptance of authority."

I have summarised and rearranged the material so that some of them could more easily and logically fit into the sub-headings I have created for the western readers of my Web-site. Otherwise the contents of the original text remains unchanged except a few amendments and correction I have made.

Your suggestion, comments and criticisms are greatly appreciated.



Giessen, 17 November 1999 Prakash Arumugam -

AN INTRODUCTION TO HINDUISM

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Source: *The Gazetteer of India, Volume 1: Country and people. Delhi, Publications Division, Government of India, 1965.* *"CHAPTER Vlll - Religion "*

An Introduction

It has been pointed out by Dr. Arnold J. Toynbee[1], in *A Study of History*, that the principal civilisations of the world lay different degrees of emphasis on specific lines of activity. Hellenic civilisation, for instance, displays a manifest tendency towards a prominently aesthetic outlook on life as a whole. Indian civilisation, on the other hand, shows an equally manifest tendency towards a predominantly religious outlook. Dr. Toynbee's remark sums up what has been observed by many other scholars. Indeed, the study of Hinduism has to be, in a large measure, a study of the general Hindu outlook on life.

Receptivity and all-comprehensiveness, it has been aptly stated, are the main characteristics of Hinduism. Since it has had no difficulty in bringing diverse faiths within its ever-widening fold, it has something to offer to almost all minds. Monier-Williams in his notable work Brahmanism and Hinduism dwelt on this aspect about a hundred years ago. The strength of Hinduism, he emphasized, lies in its infinite adaptability to the infinite diversity of human character and human tendencies. It has its highly spiritual and abstract side suited to the philosopher; its practical and concrete side congenial to the man of the world; its aesthetic and ceremonial side attuned to the man of the poetic feeling and imagination; and its quiescent contemplative aspect that has its appeal for the man of peace and the lover of seclusion. The Hindus, according to him, were Spinozists more than 2,000 years before the advent of Spinoza[2], Darwinians many centuries before Darwin. and Evolutionists many centuries before the doctrine of Evolution was accepted by scientists of the present age.

No civilisation anywhere in the world, with the probable exception of China, has been as continuous as that of India. While the civilisations of Egypt, Babylon and Assyria have disappeared, in India the ideas emanating from the Vedic times continue to be a living force.

European scholars of Sanskrit like Sir William Jones [3]noted similarities in the languages, terminology and substances of Indian scriptures with those of Greece and Rome. Even a superficial study convinced them that, while the language of the Vedas is a great critical instrument in the construction of the science of philology, the Vedic hymns constitute a compilation of most Indo-European myths in their primitive form. Max Muller [4]went so far as to say that the Vedas are the real theogony of the Aryan races, *Homer* [5]and *Hesiod* [6] having given a distorted picture of the original image.

The excavations at Harappa and Mohenjo-daro and those in Saurashtra have disclosed the existence of a highly evolved culture long before the Aryan immigration, perhaps dating back to 3000 B.C. or later. Among the remains discovered are a three-faced prototype of Siva seated in a yogic posture, representations of the Linga, and a horned goddess associated with the pipal tree. These symbols, evolved by a very ancient civilisation, were assimilated by the Aryan immigrants in slow stages-their earliest literary work, the .Rg-Veda, almost overlooks these aspects. The Vedic Aryans, it has been suggested, partly assimilated and partly

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1 English historian whose 12-volume A Study of History (1934-61) put forward a philosophy of history, based on an analysis of the cyclical development and decline of civilizations, that provoked much discussion

2 Dutch-Jewish philosopher, the foremost exponent of 17th-century Rationalism

3 British Orientalist and jurist who did much to encourage interest in Oriental studies in the West

4 German Orientalist and language scholar whose works stimulated widespread interest in the study of linguistics, mythology, and religion. His principal achievement was the editing of The Sacred Books of the East, 51 vol. (1879-1904)

5 presumed author of the Iliad and the Odyssey

6 one of the earliest Greek poets, often called the "father of Greek didactic poetry." Two of his complete epics have survived, the Theogony, relating the myths of the gods, and the Works and Days, describing peasant life

destroyed the earlier culture.

Vedic Aryans and Zoroastrianism

It seems clear from the hymns of the .Rg-Veda and the Persian Gathas[1] and Avesta[2] that the Vedic Aryans and the Zoroastrians had a common origin. The languages in which Zoroaster preached and the Rsis sang their hymns are almost identical, and Vedic meters are re-produced in the Avesta. Evidently, the two groups of Aryans separated after a violent quarrel, so that several deities of one group - Indra or Jindra, Sarva and Nasatya - were transformed in the other into evil spirits. It is, however, to be noticed that Mitra, Aryama, Vayu and Vrtraghna are divine in both the systems. A period of unity was probably followed by civil war, as envisaged in the fight between Asuras and Devas.

The Vedic Aryans were warlike, while the Avesta reflects an abhorrence of war. In the period when the ancestors of the Iranians and the Hindus had lived together, Asura had been a term of honour; and the Zoroastrian Ahura Mazda was Asura Mahat, the great Asura. The .Rg-Yeda (III-55-11 & 15) cites several Asura qualities of the Divinities. Varuna, Mitra and several other gods were called Asuras. Later, when differences were accentuated between the two communities, Asura became equivalent to a spirit of evil and Sura came to signify a good spirit.

The undivided Indo-Iranians must have passed a long time in their Central Asian home. The Indo-Iranian culture and religion have been reconstructed, at least in part, by comparing the Vedas with the Avesta. Before the occupation of Iranian high lands by tribes from the Indo-Iranian original home, the plateau was the seat of a culture that was probably matriarchal, and the people worshipped snake-gods in the manner of India's primitive non-Aryans. It is likely that the pre-Aryan cultures of North- western India and Iran were alike in origin and spirit.

This ancient cultural link between pre-Aryan Iran and pre- Aryan India, instead of getting strengthened by Aryan migration into the two countries, as could be normally expected, was to all appearances completely severed. Also, there is nothing to show that the Vedic Aryans of India maintained an active cultural relation with their brethren in Iran.

In the earliest days, while the Aryans of India must have been connected with the Aryans of Iran as friends or as foes, actual historical contact cannot be asserted with any degree of probability. The two peoples turned their backs upon each other, as it were, and developed their distinctive civilisations apparently without the least mutual influence, although in language, culture and religion their similarity in the earliest period had been little short of identity. When, later in history, under the Achaemenids[3], Greeks, Bactrians[4] and Sakas[5], the Iranians and the Indians were forced to meet as citizens of the same empire, they met as complete strangers, not as cousins or as scions from the same stock. The earliest literary productions of the Aryan settlers in India were the Rg-Veda, Sama Veda (consisting of chants), Yajur Veda and the Atharva Veda (a composite religious and magical compilation) The Vedas comprise Mantras (hymns), Brahmanas (ritual and ceremonies), Aranyakas (forest speculations) and the philosophical Upanisads. In the context of This

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[1]the early hymns, many of which may have been written by Zoroaster, are permeated by eschatological thinking. Zoroaster's teachings, as noted above, centred on Ahura Mazda, who is the highest god and alone is worthy of worship

[2] The sacred book of Zoroastrianism containing its cosmogony, law and liturgy, the teachings of the prophet Zoroaster (Zarathushtra)

[3] king of Persia (reigned 404-359/358)

[4] the rulers of Bactria the most Hellenized states in western Turkistan and Afghanistan

[5] tribes in Sinkiang, in northwestern China who spoke Middle Iranian language (300 BC to AD 950)

commonly accepted interpretation of the Vedas, it may be recalled that European Orientalists have too often considered them mainly from the theological, anthropological and sociological points of view. A study of the material in its religious aspect is difficult, since even the great commentary of Sayana is in terms of the ideas of his own age. On the presumption that the Vedas originated in primitive times, the Rg-Veda hymns were regarded as the outpourings of a child-like nature worship. John Dowson in his Hindu Classical Dictionary observed: "The Aryan settlers were a pastoral and agricultural people, and they were keenly alive to those influences which affected their prosperity and comfort. They knew the effects of heat and cold, rain and drought, upon their crops and herds, and they marked the influence of warmth and cold, sunshine and rain, wind and storm, upon their own personal comfort. They invested these benign and evil influences with a personality; and behind the fire, the sun, the cloud, and the other powers of nature, they saw beings who directed them in their beneficent and evil operations. To these imaginary beings they addressed their praises, and to them they put up their prayers for temporal blessings. They observed also the movements of the sun and moon, the constant succession of day and night, the intervening periods of morn and eve, and to these also they gave personalities, which they invested with poetical clothing and attributes. Thus observant of nature in its various changes and operations, alive to its influences upon themselves, and perceptive of its beauties, they formed for themselves deities in whose glory and honour they exerted their poetic faculty.";
But on a careful analysis of the Vedas it would be apparent that the Vedic view is more subtle and deeper in concept. The One Being whom the sages call by many names (Ekam-sat) is referred to in the neuter gender, signifying divine existence and not a divine individual. The monotheistic God stands in relation to man as a father and a patriarch, while in a Rg-Veda hymn to Agni he is called "my father, my kinsman, my brother and my friend". Monotheism, it has been aptly stated "contemplates the Divine in heaven and polytheism contemplates the Divine in the universe. Polytheism believes in the assembly of gods, each possessing a character of his own. Max Muller coined the word henotheism for indicating the tendency of the Vedic seers to magnify the importance of the particular deity they are praising in a hymn at the expense of the other gods. This has been described as "opportunist monotheism". One deity is identified with another or different deities are identified with one divine entity, indifferently described as Ekam (one) and Tat Sat (the reality).

Vedic concepts

Apart from these concepts. there are two basic ideas underlying the Vedas - Satya (truth) and Rta (eternal order); and every god or goddess exemplifies and represents these two ideas.As Abinash Chandra Bose says in his Ca11 of the Vedas, Vedic theism is based on moral values which (also in the case of Buddhism) may be upheld in a non-theistic way. In India it is not the atheist who is denounced but the person who repudiates Dharma, moral law. The Rg-Veda (X-85-1) states that the earth is sustained not by the will of God but by truth, and of This truth God is the supreme exponent, revealing Himself through Rta or eternal order. Examining the Vedic hymns as a whole, one discovers a doctrine, not of oneness, but of one divine substance pervading all. It is stated that the One Being is contemplated by the sages in many forms: Ekam santam bahudha kalpayanti (Rg-Veda, X-114-5). It may also be observed that the Vedic ritual or Yajna is a uniform ceremonial; whatever deity is worshipped, the ritual is the same.

The universality of the Vedas is not often realised. The Rg Veda asserts that God is the God of Dasa as well as of Arya - "Lord God is he to whom both Arya and Dasa belong". (Rg Veda, Vlll-51-9). There is a special prayer for the forgiveness of sins against the foreigner (Rg-Veda, V-35-7). According to the Atharva Veda, God is of the foreigner (Videsya) no less than of our own land (Samdesya). There are mantras which extend This principle to all living beings (sarvani bhutani) (Yajur Veda, 36-18) so that we come to a grand conception of universal peace and serenity - the harmony with Nature (sarvam santhi) (Yajur Veda, 36-17).

Many schools of thought

Panini is one of the world's earliest as well as the greatest of scientific grammarians. The consensus of opinion fixed his date not later than the 5th century B.C. At that period Yajna or sacrifice and the worship of

various deities were current and popular, and theistic devotion to particular divinities, generally expressed by the term Bhakti, had become prevalent. Panini refers to Vasudev as the object of devotion, and Paramatma Devata Visesa, a form of the One Supreme Divinity. The doctrine which assumed great importance later - that custom has the force of law - is also exemplified by the twofold meaning, in Panini's Astadhyayi, attached to Dharma. Dharma is not only equivalent to Rta, primordial law, but also denotes custom (acara) as in the later Dharma Sutras.

Already in Panini's days different schools of thought had arisen, both theistic and non-theistic. A non-theistic doctrine, which is described in Buddhist philosophy as the doctrine of non-causation and also as the doctrine of Yadrccha- (fortuitous accident), was current in Panini's time. That all existence was the result of chance was the doctrine of the Ahetuvadins. The Svetasvatara Upanisad which advocates the doctrine of the supreme spirit refers to other varieties of thought like those of the advocates of Svabhava or materialistic philosophy. Orthodox thought was later developed in the Samkhya philosophy and attained its climax in the Vedanta Sutras. Panini refers to Parasara Sutra, one of the earliest of the Vedanta treatises, and also to the atheistic school, known later as the Lokayata. There is mention also of Nihsreyasa which, in the Upanisads, denoted supreme bliss as also of Nirvana , possibly associated with Buddhism. From all these examples it is clear that, in the times of the Buddha and Panini[1], practically all the varieties of speculation which have flourished in India had already evolved. .

Philosophical discourses and pursuits were at first specially developed by the Ksatriyas, but they soon became the prerogatives of the Brahmins. The Chandogya and Kausitaki Upanisads illustrate these successive stages. A solution of the ultimate problems of life is outlined in the early Upanisads, and it takes the form of Monism, absolute (according to Sankaracarya) or modified (according to Ramanuja). Filled with zeal for This doctrine of the Unity or Interdependence of all life, a social order was founded. Dr. Ananda Coomaraswamy in his Dance of Siva says that the great Epics represented the desired social order as having actually existed in the golden past; they put into the mouths of their heroes not only the philosophy but the theory of its application in practice. This is evident, above all, in the long discourse of the dying Bhisma in the Santiparva of the Mahabharata. "The heroes themselves they made ideal types of character for the guidance of all subsequent generations; for the education of India has been accomplished deliberately through hero-worship. In the Dharmashastra of Manu and the Arthashastra of Chanakya - perhaps the most remarkable sociological documents the world possesses -they set forth the picture of the ideal society, defined from the stand point of law. By these and other means they accomplished what has not yet been effected in any other country, in making religious philosophy the essential and intelligible basis of popular culture and national polity".

What, then, is This view of life ? The inseparable unity of the material and spiritual world is made the foundation of Indian culture and that determines the whole character of Indian social ideals. Later Hindu thought is founded on the rhythmic nature of the world process, including evolution and involution, birth, death and rebirth, srsti and samhara. Every individual life - mineral, vegetable, animal, human- has a beginning and an end; This creation and destruction, appearance and disappearance, are of the essence of the world process and equally originate in the past, present and future. According to This view, then, every individual ego (jivatman) or separate expression of the general will to life (icchatrsna), must be regarded as having reached a certain stage of its own cycle. This is also true of the collective life of a nation, a planet or a cosmic system. It is further considered that the turning- point of This curve is reached in man, and hence the immeasurable value which Hindus (and Buddhists) attach to birth in human form. Before the turning-point is reached - to use the language of Christian theology - the natural man prevails; after it, the regener man. To sum up, Indian philosophic thought developed in several stages. The Vedic period is generally placed between 2500 B.C. and 600 B.C. As already indicated, the four Vedas, the Bramanas, Aranyakas, and Upanisads are creations of the early sages.

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The Upanisads

The Upanisads are diverse in character and outlook. They recognize intuition rather than reason as a path to ultimate truth. They also represent a strong reaction against the merely ritual and sacrificial duties on which stress had been laid earlier. The Upanisads are supposed to be 108 or more in number. Twelve of them are generally recognized as the principal units. The Isa Upanisad begins with the statement that whatever exists in This world is enveloped by the Supreme. It is by renunciation and absence of possessiveness that the soul is saved. In the Kena Upaniad, the Goddess Uma Haimavati in the form of Supreme Knowledge expounds the doctrine of the Brahman or Supreme Entity. The Katha Upanisad embodies the aspiration of Naciketas, who declined his father's offer of property and went into exile, making his way to the region of Yama,the God of Death. Naciketas, in his dialogue with Yama, declines all the worldly possessions and dignities offered by Yama and asserts that all enjoyments are transient and the boon he asks for is the secret of immortality. In This Upanisad occurs the famous saying "The knowledge of the Supreme is not gained by argument but by the teaching of one who possesses intuition"

In the Mundaka Upanisad occurs the verse which is the germ of the Bhagavad-Gita . People who perform actions and are attached to the world are pursuing a futile path, and This Upanisad accordingly declares: "Let the wise man, having examined the world and perceived the motives and the results of actions, realize that as from a blazing fire sparks proceed, living souls originate from the indestructible Brahman and return to Him. All doubts disappear and the attachment to work subsides when the Supreme Being is cognized."

These basic doctrines are further expounded in the Taitiriya Upanisad, which contains This famous verse repeated in other Upanisads: """May we both (teacher and disciple) be protected; may we both obtain sustenance; !et both of us at the same time apply (our) energies (for the acquirement of knowledge); may our reading be illustrious; may there be no hatred (amongst us). Peace, peace, peace . In the more recent Svetasvatara Upanisad is found a summary of the main Upanisadic doctrines, and the idea of devotion to a personal God is also developed. The Chandogya Upanisad, one of the earliest, states that the main doctrines of the Upanisads, were first expounded by the Kshatriyas and not by the Brahmins. Later, as is evident from the Kausitaki Upanisad, the Brahmins took up the intensive study of philosophy. The contrast which is often drawn between Brahminism and Hinduism is therefore not based on a right appraisal of the facts.

The Epics

The period of the Epics succeeded the period of the Upanisads. In the Ramayana and the Mahabharat, philosophical doctrines were presented in the form of stories and parables. In these poems of the heroic age recounting the qualities and exploits of exalted individuals the Vedic gods are no longer supreme. Some have disappeared altogether. Indra retains a place of some dignity; but Brahma, Siva and Visnu have risen to pre-eminence. Even of these three, the first becomes subordinate. Visnu and Siva become the out- standing entities and are alternately elevated to supreme dignity and very often their ultimate oneness is proclaimed. Visnu in the Vedas was the friend and companion of Indra and strode over the universe in three paces; in the Epics he often becomes the great deity of destruction as well as of renovation. Each of these two gods in his turn contends with and subdues the other; now one, now the other, receives the homage of his rival, a d each in turn is lauded and honoured as the greatest of gods.

The Avatars

The Avatars, incarnations of Visnu, assume a prominent place in the Epics, and more so in the Puranas. The first three, Matsya (fish), Kurma (tortoise) and Varaha (boar) have a cosmic character and are foreshadowed in the hymns of the vedas. The fourth incarnation, Nrsimha (man-lion), seems to belong to a later age, when the worship of Visnu had become established. The fifth, Vamana (dwarf), whose three strides deprived the

Asuras of the domination of heaven and earth, is in character anterior to the fourth Avatara and the three strides are attributed to Visnu in the Vedic text as Urukrama. The sixth, seventh and eighth, Parasurama. Ramcandra and Krsna, are mortal heroes whose exploits are celebrated in these poems so fervently as to raise the heroes to the rank of gods. The ninth Avatara, the Buddha, is the deification of a great teacher. The tenth, Kalki, is yet to come; he resembles the manifestation referred to in the Biblical Revelation.
The system of religious thought propounded in the Vedas and the Epics and especially in the Bhagavad-Gita (a part of the Mahabharata) survived the Buddhist impact which led to a renunciation of much ritual and metaphysics on the part of a sizable proportion of the population. Buddhism was absorbed into the parent religion within a few centuries and Hinduism, as the Vedic religion had come to be called, adopted the theory of the Avataras or incarnations according to which the Buddha himself was accepted as Avatara. Jainism also became, in essence, a doctrinal modification and adaptation of the Vedic religion.
Dr. Toynbee has noted, in response to an ever more insistent craving in Indic souls to apprehend the unity of God, the myriad divinities gradually dissolved and colesced into one or other of the two mighty figutre of Siva and Vishnu. he adds that this stage on the road towards the apprehension of the unity of god was attained at least 1,500 years ago.

Buddhist Influence

We now come to the greatest contribution made by the Buddha to Indian thought and world culture. Dr. Radhakrishnan, in his edition of 'Dhammapada" (which embodies Buddhist teachings), has stated that, judged by intellectual integrity, moral earnestness and spiritual insight, the Buddha is undoubtedly one of the greatest figures in history. The same scholar pointed out that, altough ther were different streams of thought operating on men's minds in the 6th century B.C. philosophic thought was agreed at that time on certain fundamentals. Life does not begin at birth or end at death; it is a link in an infinite series of lives. each of which is conditioned and determined by acta done in previous existences. Relief from the round of births, resulting in life in eternity is the goal, indicated by such terms as Moksa(deliverance) and Nirvana(union with the Brahman). The means of attainment are prayer and worship; ritual and sacrifice; and Vidya(realization by knowledge).

Even though the Buddha accepted the doctrines of Karma and rebirth and the non-reality of the empirical universe, he declined to speculate on Moksa and on the doctrine of the Atman and Paramatman . He laid stress on the supremacy of the ethical aspect, and his outlook was definitely practical and empirical. In fact, the Buddha did not tolerate any doctrines which, he thought, diverted the mind from the central problem of suffering, the cause of suffering and its removal, and the urgency of the moral task.
. He rejected the doctrine of the Vedanta that the ego is permanent and unchanging. At the same time, he did not countenance the view that, at death, it is destroyed. As Dr. Radhakrishnan says, the Buddha came to the conclusion that interest in the super- natural diverts attention and energy from the ethical values and the exploration of actual conditions: Karma builds the world and Dharma is an organic part of all existence.

The Bhagavad-Gita

Every variety of Hindu philosophy has its source in the Upanisads, the Brahma Sutras of Badarayana of Vyasa and the Bhagavad-Gita which forms a part of the Mahabharata. It was as a reaction to the tendencies exhibited by Buddhism and Jainism that the orthodox schools of Indian philosophy had their origin and the Bhagavad-Gita is their epitome.
This work contains the essence of Indian teaching about the duties of life as well as spiritual obligations. Everyone has his allotted duties of various kinds. Sin arises not from the nature of the work itself but from the disposition with which the work is performed. When it is performed without attachment to the result, it

cannot tarnish the soul and impede its quest. True Yoga consists in the acquisition of experience and the passage through life in harmony with the ultimate laws of equanimity, non-attachment to the fruits of action, and faith in the pervasiveness of the Supreme Spirit. Absorption in that Spirit can be attained along several paths; and no path is to be preferred cxclusively and none to be disdained. These doctrines have been interpreted as marking a Protestant movement which lays stress on the personality of God and His accessibility to devotion. While following the Hindu ideal of the Asramas, the Gita emphasizes the importance of knowledge, charity, penance and worship, and does not decry life as evil:
"Nor indeed can embodied beings completely relinquish action; verily, he who relinquisheth the fruit of action, he is said to be a true relinquisher."

The Dharma Sastras

Later, treatises on ethical and social philosophy known as the Dharma Sastras were compiled, They deal systematically with the proper conduct of life and describe social , ethical and religious obligations. The Sutras, of which the Brahma Sutra is the chief, are brief aphorisms or maxims. They contain interpretations of philosophic systems and refutations of opposing beliefs. It is remarkable that all philosophical systems in India are known as Darsanas, literally meaning calling insights or points of view. In the well known Sarvadar sanasangraha compiled by Madhavacarya, a great successor of Sankaracarya , the Carvaka or atheistic school, Buddhism, Jaini sm, the Vaisnava philosophy of Ramanuja and Madhva, the Saiva system and several other doctrinal variants, are all described as Darsanas and as legitimate developments of Hindu thought: There are Sutras dealing with the Logical Realism of Nyaya, the Atomistic Pluralism of Vaisesika, the Evolutionism of Samkhya, the tech nique of Mind-control or Yoga, the ritualistic philosophy of Purva-Mimamsa and the metaphysics of Vedanta which attained its climax in the work of Sankara.

The Puranas

The Puranas cover the intermediate period between thc Vedic and the Classical epochs. Cast in the form of parables and narratives, they became the scripture for the common people. Apart from their religious and often sectarian significance, they furnish a picture of social, political and cultural life and comprise an astonishingly varied repertory of folklore and information regarding diverse topics including philosophy, ethics, legal institutions, popular festivals,and several arts; they deal even with subjects like grammar, prosody, rhetoric, archery and care of horses and elephants; many of them also describe places of pilgrimage. At one time their historical value was discounted; but it is now being gradually appreciated.

Fusion with non-Aryans

The Aryans marched en masse, guided by a leader who was often a poet, and came into contact with the Dasas and the Dasyus. The point to be noted is the speedy fusion of the Aryans with the non-Aryans. The process had three phases: (I) The elevation of non-Aryans and aboriginals by intermarriages with Aryans. (2) The incorporation of non-Aryans into Aryan society in various other ways. (3) Social reactions by which forms of 1ife and modes of thought of the two groups under went a kind of osmosis, intensified by the Buddhist protestant reformation.
The Aitareya Brahmana gives an example of the manner in which progressive leaders of the Aryans facilitated the assimilation of other communities. A Rsi was performing a sacrifice on the banks of the Sarasvati; and to this sacrifice was admitted one Kesava Ailusa, a Sudra, whose learning is stated to have put all the Brahmins to shame. The Vajasaneyi Samhita condemned intercommunal marriage, but it is narrated in that work (ch. 23, 30 and 31) that a Sudra was the lover of an Arya woman. By the time of the Mahabharata such great personages as Vyas and Vidura were described as the offspring of the connection of the Aryans with other groups. The story of Santanu and Satyavati, the vow of Bhisma as well as the story of Ambika and Ambalika and the birth of Vidura, also illustrate the above process.

Again, in the Mahabharata, it is narrated that Bhima married Hidimbi, a non-Aryan woman, and Arjuna married a Naga girl, Ulupi. A new class of Aryans called Utkrsta came into existence, and was admitted to the privileges of sacrifice. By the time of the Satapathabrahmaa Sudras became incorporated in the polity - a notable instance being the Nisadas. lt is a curious fact (vide Panini's Grammar, ch. VI, 62, 58) that there were non-Aryan Brahmins as well.
Parasara, one of the great sages of India, married Satyavati, a fisher girl, who became the mother of Vyasa, the compiler of the Mahabharata and the Puranas. Such intermarriages or unions were frequent all through Indian history. Emperor Candragupta Maurya who belonged to a lower caste, married Kumara Devi of the Licchavi clan, who was either a Brahmin or a Ksatriya, and she was the grandmother of Asoka.

It should be remembered that the groups which crystallized later into the Indian castes were initially not based on any gradation of superiority, the difference being functional rather than racial or communal. These groups, moreover, had their analogues in the Avesta, and the Iranian names do not suggest the idea of colour or superiority. Co-operation of all the classes was needed for administration, and a passage in the Mahbharata indicates that the King's Council included representatives of all classes of the people.
The current rigidity of the rules relating to intermarriage as also interdining among the Indian castes is a comparatively recent innovation. These lines found in severl Puranas are significant: "The great sage Vasistha was born of a divine courtesan, but by austerity and penance he made himself recognized as a Brahmin. The transforming process was attained by self-imrovement." Another passage says, "Vyas was by birth a fisherman, Parasar was born in a dog-eating tribe, Many non-Dvijas have in the past attained Brahmanhood by their merit." The Bhagavad-Gita affirms: "Castes developed according to the differentiation of Guna and Karma", i.e., disposition or temperament and inherited instincts or aptitudes.
Both among the Old Iranians and the Aryans of India the original caste system of three classes based on the practical distritution of functions was in existence. The Iranians, however, did not develop another class as the Hindus did - the Sudra. Clearly, the three Hindu caste divisions were not unalterably rigid. The definition of the word Dvija, twice-born, makes the position clear. Dvija is a person who has certain basic qualities: "lf a man 's activities be derived from his jati or birth, from his, occupation, from study and knowledge, and if all these are found combined, then he is to be called a Dvija, and not otherwise".

Cultural synthesis

In their great trek to India the colonizing groups of Aryans encountered races who professed a firm belief in the doctrine of transmigration. It has indeed been suggested that this doctrine of metempsychosis itself, the cult of serpent worship, the worship of Ganesa, of Uma or Durga, of Skanda or Subrahmanya (the hunter-god) were all adopted by the Aryans from earlier settlers in India. Even the incarnation of Krsna, it has been said, was an adaptation from an aboriginal deity; his life is an instance of the mingling of the Aryans and the Yadavas. In any case, it seems clear that there was a good measure of synthesis of the thoughts and beliefs of the Aryan and pre-Aryan races.
There are widespread traditions of the southern migration of the Vedic sage, Agastya, the reputed author of several hymns of the Rg-Veda. His asrama was located south of the Vindhyas; and he is said to have introduced the Vedic religion and literature in the South in his capacity as a uniifying factor between the Sanskritic and Dravidian tongues and ideals. When the Aryan colonisers in the wake of Agastya penetrated to the South, they found an advanced civilisation. The Ramayana describes Madurai as adorned with golden jewels. The grammarian Katyayana mentions the Pandyas and the Colas. Asoka's Buddhist missions were sent to the Pandya and Cola countries as far as Tamrapani river in the Tirunelveli District. An extensive commercial and cultural inter course grew up between the Aryans and the Dravidians, as also between the Dravidians and countries to the east and west of India.
The close contact between the Aryan and Dravidian elements continued all through history and manifested itself in every aspect of life. There is strong ground for the supposition that the importance of Siva, Sakti and Skanda was due largely to Dravidian influence, since the cult of An (Siva), Amma (Sakti) and Anil (Muruga or Skanda) was a cardinal belief from the beginning of Dravidian history.
These facts illustrate the composite character of Hindu civilisation. The Sama Veda spoke at length of the

Vratyastoma (a particular sacrifice or ritual) by which non-Aryan Vratyas were admitted into Aryan society. The equalization of castes and communities was, of course, brought to a head by Gautama Buddha, though he was no opponent of the Brahminical civilisation. Both he and Mahavira, the expounder of Jainism, while admitting that the Brahmin ideal is the right one, led a crusade against certain aspects of Brahmin culture. Hindu civilisation itself adapted for its use many ideals and precepts of Buddhism and Jainism. For instance, among many communities, offerings of rice and ghee took the place of animal sacrifice - a compromise with the Vedic ritualism. The early Aryans had, of course, been meat-eaters, but probably under the influence of Buddhist and Jain ideas many groups of Brahmins as well as non-Brahmins became vegetarian.

Vaisnavism in the South

At a later period arose the fully organized Bhakti movement leading to Vaisnavism and Saivism. The ancient Vaisnava mystics and saints in the South were known as Alvars, and the Vaisnavism teachers as Acaryas. They had a powerful exponent of these views in Ramanuja, who attacked the Advaita interpretation of the Upanisads and gave recognition to three ultimate realities, God, Soul and Matter, the last two being dependent on the first.

As early as the 2nd century B. C. the renowned Besnagar Column had been erected by a Greek named Heliodorous, who had been converted to the Bhagavata or Vaisnava faith of which the Pancaratra doctrines then formed an integral part; its scriptures were Satvata Samhita, the Mahabharata, and the Bhagavata and Visnu Puranas. The origin of the Pancaratra doctrines which form the basis of Srivaisnava culture has been traced further back to the well known Purusasukta of the Rg-Veda. The Satapatha Brahmana refers to the Pancaratra sacrifices performed by the primeval Narayana, the idea of Nara and Narayana (Primordial man and the deity Visnu) being an integral part of ancient Indian thought. There are more than a dozen Vaisnava Upanisads. It was in the period from the 10th century up to the 17th that many Vaisnava works were produccd. The Vaisnavas regard the Pancaratra literature as almost equal to the Vedas.

The Vaisnava Samhitas and other works insist on knowledge of and devotion to, the supreme Godhead rather than on Vedic studies or sacrifices. It is worthy of note that in the Bhagavata Purana (11th Skanda) the A!vars were prefigured or adverted to; several great devotees of Visnu, the Purana states, would appear on the banks of the Tamraparni, Krtamala (Vaigai), Payasvin (Palar), Kaveri (Cauvery), and Mahanadi (Periyar).

The Alvars lived between the 5th and the 12th centuries. The first group included Saroyogin or Poygaiyal var, Bhatayogin or Bhutattalvar, Mahadyogin or Peyalvr and Bhaktisara or Tirumalisai-Piran. Nammalvar or Satakopa, who came in the next group, was perhaps the greatest of the Alvars. Others in this group included Madhurakaviyalvar, Kulasekhara Perumal, Visnucitta (or Periyalvar) and Andal, his adopted daughter. In the last of the groups were Bhaktanghrirenu (Tondaradippodiyal- var), Yogivahana (Tiruppanalvar) and Parakala (Tirumangaiyalvar). The Divya Prabhandha constitutes the collection of the Alvars' compositions in the Tamil language.

The advent of Sankara

The next important milestone is the advent of Sankara. In his short but marvellously active life, he travelled all through the country, refuting atheistic and materialistic systems of thought, wrote commentaries on the Upanisads, on the Brahma Sutra and on the Gita. He interpreted these scriptures and built up his thesis with wonderful clarity and depth of exposition. He remoulded Indian thought and destroyed many dogmas. His great capacity for deep feeling and emotional expression was combined with relentless logic. Sankara's contribution to philosophy is his blending of the doctrines of Karma and Maya, which culminated in a logical exposition of the idea of non-dualism. The entire universe consisting of Namarupa, names and forms, is but an appearance; Brahman, infinite consciousness, is the sole reality. Its attainment and the annihilation of the great illusion of the universe called Maya, by a process of realization, were the objects of Sankara's quest. He revivifid the doctrines of the Upanisads and, in Dr. Radhakrishnan's words, he was not a mere dreaming idealist but a practical visionary. His Advaita doctrine is still a living force in India. Sankaracarya established several mathas in India to propagate the Vedantic or Advaita doctrine and the succesive heads of these mathas as well as later scholars like Madhusudana Sarasvati and the great polymath Appayya Diksita have

produced important treatises, elucidating the Vedanta as propoundd by Sankaracarya.
Sankara's outlook was based strictly on philosophical thought and logic; but even he has, in numerous compositions, dcscribed the supreme entity in a personal aspect as saviour, helper, friend and guide. He wrote poems dedicated to Nrsimha, Sri Krsrna, Laksmi, and Annapurna, and there is his celebrated lyrical homage to Parvati or Durga - the Saundaryalahari.
Sankara was followed by Ramanuja, Madhva and others who called themselves commentators but were indeed creators of new systems. Ramanuja's philosophy was termed qualified monism and Madhva's was a dualistic system. The three major forms of Vedanta developed respectively by Sankara, Ramanuja, and Madhva are distinct philosophies, although each professes to have stemmed from the same three sources - the Upanisads, the Brahma Sutra and the Gita.

Ramanuja

Ramanuja, of course, was concerned much more with the personal aspect. His teachings may be regarded as a reaction against the tendency to view religion on the intellectual rather than the emotional plane. He assimilated many beliefs of the Dravidian civilisation and helped to encourage and promote temple worship and public festivals. Born early in the 11th century, Ramanuja was deeply influenced by the Tamil saints and Alvars - their ideas coloured his interpretation of thc Upanisads and the Brahma Sutra. He put forward a theistic view of the Vedas as against the rigid Advaita point of view of Sankara. Basing his thoughts on Bodhayana and the theistic Upanisads, the Mahabharata (including the Bhagavad-Gita), Visnu Purana as well as the compositions of the Alvars and Acaryas, Ramanuja produced a number of works culminating in the Sribhasya . He proclaimed the doctrine of salvation through Bhakti or faith. His earlier followers came to be known as Vadagala is. About two centuries later the Tengalais appeared; they, unlike thc Vadagalais, did not concentrate on Sanskrit scriptures and traditions and regarded Tamil scriptures as equally canonical.
There were several points of difference between Ramanuja and early Vaisnava teachers like Nadamuni and Yamunacarya. One was the importance attached to Swami Krpa, Grace of God. According to one school, this is spontaneous, not depending on any effort or merit of the devotee. The other school asserts that Grace also depends on the devotee's virtuous action. The religious approach of Ramanuja was mainly based on self-surrender, which must result in universal charity and sympathy, and friendliness even to an enemy. He insisted that the performance of scriptural duties alone was not enough for salvation. Karma Yoga and Jnana Yoga, according to the Ramanuja school, only purify the mind in preparation for Bhakti Yoga or devotion. Ramanuja's Saranagati Gadya is a notable contribution to the gospel of self-surrender, but it does not rule out caste functions and duties, and the doctrine of Karma.
Vedanta Desika, the greatest successor of Ramanuja, and a strong opponent of Sankara's Advaita doctrine, wrote a very controversial work, Satadusani. Pillai Lokacarya, the famous exponent of the Tengalai school, advocated passive surrender (Praptti) in preference to active faith (Bhakti), and the guidance of a spiritual preceptor, Manavala Maha Muni is the chief Saint of the Tengalais. This school built up a remarkable Tamil literature to which it ascribed an importance equal to that of the Vedas - it was called the Tamil Tirumurai or the Tamil Veda. In essence, however, there was no fundamental doctrinal divergence belween the two sects. Differences in certain features such as caste marks on the forehead and temple ceremonials and usage became accentuated in later years.

Successors of Ramanuja

As the ideas of Ramanuja spread through India, men like Madhvacarya, Vallabhacarya, Caitanya, Ramananda, Kabir and Nanak came under their spell. Ramanuja and his followers opposed the doctrine of Maya and the interpretation of the world as purely phenomenal or illusory. They emphasized the distinction between thc individual soul and the supreme Godhead and based their philosophy on man's conviction of sin, his responsibility for sin and the importance of grace emanating from thc divine. In other words, they believed that salvation comes not specially through Jnana (knowledge) or karma (action), but through Bhakti (faith) and Prasada (grace). The Bhagavata doctrine of complete resignation to God was one of the articles of their

faith. God was viewed alterlnately as father, mother, child, teacher and friend, and even as the beloved. Ramanuja declared that caste had nothing to do with the soul's quality; some of the Alvars were in fact non-Brahmins. Ramanuja is said to have admitted even Harijans to the temple at Melkote. One of his later followers, Ramananda, who lived in the 13th century, not only protested against caste distinctions but enjoined that no man should ask any devotee about his caste or sect: whoever worships God is God's own.

Later followers of Ramanuja included a number of scholars who sustained his philosophic system through the centuries. While accepting the set rituals of initiation and worship, they admitted Jains, Buddhists, Sudras and Harijans into their fold. A celebrated successor of Ramanuja was Nimbarka, who lived about the same time as Madhvacarya. According to his philosophy, which is a type of Bhedabhedavada, that is, the theory of the Absolute as Unity-in- difference, Brahman or the Absolute has transformed itself into the world of matter and spirit. As the Life-force, Prana manifests itself in the various cognitive sense functions, and yet keeps its own independence, integrity and difference, so the Brahman also manifests itself through the numberless spirits and matter, without losing itself in them. As the spider spins its web out of itself and yet remains independent of the wcb, so the Brahman splits itself up into numberless spirits and matter but retains its fullness and purity.

The reaction against Sankara's Advaitism reached its climax in Madhvacarya's dualistic philosophy. It resembles Ramanuja's doctrine to some extent but stands for unqualified dualism. Madhva, also known as Purnapranjna and Anandatirtha, was born near Udipi in South Kanara in the 12th century. He draws a clear distinction between God and the individual soul, God and matter, individual soul and matter, one soul and another and one variety ot matter and another. Large groups in India follow this doctrine which bases itself on the feeling of absolutc dependence on God and love for Him.

Madhvacarya attacked Sankara vehemently on the ground that his philosophy was a disguised variety of Buddhism. It is well known that Sankara was strongly influenced by Gaudapada, who had great regard for the Buddhist philosophy, and it is unquestionable that, while Sankara was opposed to Buddhist thought in general, he was perhaps unconsciously influenced by some of its tenets. Madhva, on the other hand, objected to Advaita: it seemed to him presumptuous for the individual soul to claim identity with Brahman. According to his doctrine, Visnu is the only supreme being; and Bhakti is the primary essential for liberation. Among his great disciples was Purandaradasa, reputed as a social reformer and one of the creators of the Karnataka system of music. Vadiraja, a renowned writer, was another Madhva philosopher.

Vaisnavism in the North

One of the most influential Vaisnava cults was founded by Vallabhacarya, a Telugu Brahmin who lived in the 15th century. He migrated to the North and in his numerous works in the North he gave an interpretation of the Vedanta differing from that of Ramanuja, as also of Sankara. He called his doctrine Suddha Advaita, pure non- dualism. The world is real, and not an illusion. God is Nimitta- Karana, the causative being. Discarding the Maya theory Vallabhacarya asserts that God cannot be described by negatives but only by his holy and gracious attributes, and is personified in Krsna He is not only karta, creator, but also Bhokta, enjoyer. Though he has no need to assume a bodily form, he often does so to please his devotees. Regarding Bhakti as the chief means of salvation and superior to Jnana, (knowledge) Vallabha opposed all kinds of asceticism. The body is the temple of God, he said. The famous Upanisadic precept Tatvamasi was by an ingenious interpretation, modified by Vallabha as Atatvamasi, "That thou art not". Vallabhacarya's doctrines were fully interpreted and expounded by his son Vitthala.

Later, in Northern India, there arose the Caitanya movement. Nimbarka had already elevated Radha, the consort of Krsna, to the highest position. Jayadeva, the author of Gita-Govinda, and other poets like Vidyapati, Umapati and Candidas, adopted the Radha-Krsna cult. Caitanya, the great Vaisnava teacher of the 15th century transformed the Vaisnava faith and extended his influcnce in most parts of Northern India. He accepted converts from Islam, the foremost among them being Haridas, Rupa and Sanatana. Salvation, according to his doctrine, consists in the eternal experience of God's love. Caitanya exercised great influence over later Indian thought.

Saktism

The cult of Sakti or the mother aspect of Godhead had its roots in the Vedas. The Rg-Veda describes Sakti as the embodiment of power and the upholder of the universe. Sakti is represented as the sister of Krsna and the wife of Siva. She is worshipped as Devi, who is one with Brahman. The literature of Saktism, called the Tantra, gives a high place to women and reacts strongly against caste distinctions. According to the doctrines of the Sakta cult (embodied in 77 Agamas), Siva or the supreme entity is impersonal and beyond activity. Sankara in his Saundarya1ahari declares: "Siva is able to function when united with Sakti; otherwise he is inert." he Sakta cult and philosophy has had great influence in Bengal and Assam, as well as in Malabar.

A variant of the Saivite philosophy, which developed in Kashmir, is known as the Pratyabhijna system. Here, as Dr. Radhakrishnan says, Siva is the subject as well as the object, the experiencer as well as the experienced. "As the consciousness on which all this resultant world is established,whence it issues, is free in its nature, it cannot be restricted anywhere. As it moves in the differentiated states of waking, sleeping, etc., identifying itself with them, it never falls from its true nature as the knower." In theeme Godhead rather than on Vedic studies or sacrifices. It is worthy of note that in the Bhagavata Purana (11th Skanda) the A!vars were prefigured or adverted to; several great devotees of Visnu, the Purana states, would appear on the banks of the Tamraparni, Krtamala (Vaigai), Payasvin (Palar), Kaveri (Cauvery), and Mahanadi (Periyar). The Alvars lived between the 5th and the 12th centuries. The first group included Saroyogin or Poygaiyal var, Bhatayogin or Bhutattalvar, Mahadyogin or Peya is the unchanging consciousness and Sakti its changing power, appearing as mind and matter.

Cultural fusions in the South

Early Indian history cannot be viewed in its true perspective unless the institutions of the South receive adequate treatment. The unity of India transcends the diversities of blood, fusions in colour, language, dress, manners and sects. It is seen in the fusion of Brahminical ideas and institutions with Dravidian cults. This unity, however, has been limited by the later developments of the caste system in a manner different from the original conception which was functional in character and elastic in scope.

A typical South Indian village almost invariably has a temple dedicated to Ayyanar or Hariharaputra or Hanuman or Anjaneya, or Ganesa. On many hill-tops there are shrines dedicated to the Devi (Candi) or Kartikeya also named Subrahmanya. These exemplify the tolerant and assimilative outlook of the Aryans. In the context mention has already been made of the Vratyastoma (a particular sacrifice or ritual) by means of which masses of non-Aryans (Vratyas) were admitted into the Aryan society.

According to South lndian tradition, Tamil as first developed by the sage Agastya, to whom a grammar, a treatise on philosophy and many other works are ascribed. The oldest Tamil grammar now extant, the Tolkappiynm, is said to have been the work of one of his disciples. The Saivite and Vaisnavite revival due to the Brahmins in Southern India, since the 8th century, brought about a counter- movement among the Jains. Early Buddhism in Northern India adopted the Prakrit or vernacular speech for its religious treatises. On the same analogy, Buddhism and Jainism in the South created works in the dialects of the people. The Dravidian Buddhists and Jains created a Tamil literature which was anti-Brahmanical in sentiment ; and covered the period between the 9th and 13th centuries.

The Kural of Tiruvalluvar * dating not later than the 10th century A.D. is said to have been the work of a poet belonging to one of the depressed classes. It enforces thc Samkhya philosophy in 1,330 poetical aphorisms based on three subjects: wealth, pleasure and virtue. To the sister of its author, the poetess Avvaiyar, are ascribed many compositions of the highest moral tone, and they have enjoyed perennial popularity in Southern India. The Jain period of Tamil literature includes works on ethics. In the same

* Tirukural should have been written before 100B.C I suppose. I could not understand how come tiruvalluvar and kambar could be contemporary thinkers. There is no mention of valluavr's life around 500 to 1200 A.D. (suggested by Shri Senthil)

period a celebrated adaptation of the Ramayana was composed in Tamil by Kambar. This is a Tamil paraphrase rather than a literal translation of the ancient Sanskrit Epic.

Between this period and the 16th century, two encyclopaedic collections of Tamil hymns, deeply religious in spirit, were gradually formed. One collection was the work of Saivite devotees and their disciples who sought to uproot Jainism. Vaisnavite apostles of the same period were equally prolific in Tamil religious songs. Their Book of Four Thousand Psalms, Nalayira Prabandham, constitutes a hymnology dating from the 12th century.

Saivite sects The development of Vaishnavism saw a parallel development of the Saiva theism. A distinctive philosophy of Saiva Siddhanta was evolved about the 11th century. The Saiva Agamas were based on the Vedic concept of Rudra. A large number of inspired writers in the Tamil country were headed by Manikkavasagar. All their works have been collected and are venerated by the South Indian Saivites. The first part of this collection, Tevaram, contains the hymns of Appar, Sambandar and Sundarar. The second part mainly comprises Manikkavasagar's Tiruvasakam. Sixty three Saiva saints are recognized and their lives are recounted in the Periya Puranam Sekkilar.

Dr. Pope, the well known Tamil grammarian, has stated that Saiva Siddhanta is one of the most influential and intrinsically valuable of the religious writings in India. The Saiva Siddhanta recognizes three entities: God, thc Soul or the aggregate of souls, and Bondage (Pati, Pasu and Pasa). The expression Bondage denotes the aggregate of the elements which fetter the soul and hold it back from union with God. In one of its aspects it is Malam, the taint clinging to the soul. In another aspect it is Maya, the material cause of the world. The peculiarity of the Saiva Siddhanta doctrine which calls itself Suddhadvaita is its difference from the Vedanta Monism. God pervades and energizes all souls and, nevertheless, stands apart. This concept of the absolute is clear from the Tamil word for God, Kadavul, meaning that which transcends (kada) all things and is yet the heart (ul) of all things. When the absolute becomes manifest, it is as Force (Sakti) of which the universe is the product. The Dvaita system, on the other hand, insists on a radical pluralism, and at the same time on the complete dependence of the souls and the world on God.

One of the important Saivite sects known as Virasaiva was founded by a Brahmin named Basava, who was for some time the minister of a ruler in Kalyan. The Basava Purana outlines Basava's life. This as also Basava's own writings in Kannada, describes the fundamentals of a doctrine based on rigid monotheism, Siva being regarded as the supreme, limitless and transcendent entity. Brahmana is the identity of "being", "bliss" and consciousness, and devoid of any form of differentiation. It is limitless and beyond all ways of knowledge. It is self-luminous and absolutely without any barrier of knowledge, passion or power. It is in Him that the whole world of the conscious and the unconscious remains, in a potential form untraceable by our senses, and it is from Him that the whole world becomes expressed or manifest of itself, without the operation of any other instrument.

The Virasaivas, often called Lingayats, are distinguished by the Sivalinga and rudraksa on their person and they smear their bodies with ashes. They are strict vegetarians and abstain from drink. The Virasaiva doctrine has four schools, but the differences are of a minor kind. All believe in the efficacy of a Guru or preceptor. All assert the reality of the Universe and unity with Siva, the only ultimate reality. The Virasaiva doctrine is prevalent in Mysore and in the southern regions of Maharashtra.

Great movements of reform

Side by side with these philosophical systems, a large body of devotional literature in the spoken languages of India has been developed. This was due to the advent of great reformers-Ramananda, Kabir, Nanak, Mirabai, Vallabhacarya, Caitanya, Tulasidasa, and Tukaram. Ramananda and his Muslim disciple Kabir emphasized the belief in a supreme deity and recognized no caste distinctions, although they accepted the doctrines of Karma and Samsara. Nanak founded the religion of the Sikhs. He was under the influence of Islam as well as of Hinduism and, like Kabir, he believed in Karma and Samsara, Maya and Moksa. He laid great stress on a personal God and a society of disciples not bound by caste or race restrictions. The militant character of Sikhism was a later development due to Aurangzeb's intolerance and persecution.

The great saints of Maharashtra and Bengal created a wonderful literature of Bhakti based on the worship of Rama or of Krsna. Vallabhacarya, in particular, attacked Sankara's Advaita doctrine. He preached that by God's grace alone can man obtain release. Caitanya, a contemporary of Vallabha, and his followers called Goswamis, were itinerant preachers whose sincerity of religious experience brought about a reformation in Bengal. The common features in Bhakti cults have been pointed out by D. S. Sarma in his Renaissance of Hinduism:

1. Belief in one supreme God of Love and Grace.
2. Belief in the individuality of every soul, which is nevertheless part of the Divine Soul.
3. Belief in salvation through Bhakti.
4. The exaltation of Bhakti above Jnana and Karma; and, also above, the performance of rites and ceremonies.
5. Extreme reverence paid to the Guru.
6. The doctrine of the Holy Name.
7. Initiation through a mantra and a sacramental meal.
8. The institution of sectarian orders of Sannyasins.
9. The relaxing of the rules of caste, sometimes even ignoring all caste distinctions.
10. Religious teaching through the vernaculars. It was out of these Bhakti cults that the Sikh group transformed itself into a military brotherhood. Bhakti cults gave rise to such works as the Ramayana by Tulasidasa, the , Abhanga of Tukaram and the poems of devotees like Ramprasad of Bengal and Tayumanavar of South India and passionate outpouring of Mira Bai. All these helped to popularize the spirit of devotion and resulted in a great religious revival in many parts of India.

Renaissance in Hinduism

In the 18th century religion suffered a serious decline mainly because the impact of a completely different civilisation. English education destroyed the isolation of India and brought about an active ferment. Many Indians of the time became either sceptics who leaned towards Christianity, or reactionaries who sought to preserve at any cost the ancient forms and institutions. Fortunately, at this time, enlightened Europeans like Sir William Jones, Sir Charles Wilkins, Colebrooke, Monier-Williams and Max Muller revealed by comment and by translation the treasures of ancient Indian wisdom. Their work was later supplemented by art lovers and art critics, who revealed the secrets of sacred and secular art-forms and concepts.

As an outcome of these influences and counter-influences, there arose a series of movements which have been rightly described as a renaissance of Hindu life and thought. Raja Ramamohun Roy was the most outstanding pioneer of these movements. He struck a note of universalism in tune with the spirit of the Upanisads. Born in Bengal in 1772, he studied Persian, Arabic and English. In 1803 he published a book in Persian, with a preface in Arabic, entitled Tuhfat-ul- Muwahhidin. It carried a protest against idolatory and sought to establish a universal religion based on the idea of the unity of Godhead. He started a controversy with the Christian missionaries and published a book in which he tried to separate the moral teachings of Jesus from the miracles described in the Gospels. Rammohun Roy, along with David Hare, stressed the necessity of education in India on modern lines, in opposition to those who objected to English education and insisted on a return to the past. He repeatedly declared that he had no intention of breaking away from the ancestral religion, and wished to see it restored to its original purity. In order to carry out his ideas he founded the Brahmo Samaj on the basis of theism. The Trust Deed of the Samaj laid down that "no graven image, statue or sculpture carving, painting, picture, portrait or the likeness of anything shall be admitted within the building."

The Brahmo Samaj

Debendranath Tagore, the next great leader of the Samaj, formulated the Brahmopadesa, comprising tenets from the Upanisads and Tantras. His successor, Keshub Chandra Sen, sought to incorporate Christian ideals into the Brahmo Samaj movement. He began the compilation of a scripture including passages from the Holy Books of many religions - Hindu, Buddhist, Hebrew, Christian, Muslim etc. Then he went to England in 1870, he was welcomed by many Christian organizations. As the result of secessions in the Brahmo Samaj, three institutions arose: The Adi Brahmo Samaj; the New Dispensation of Keshub Chandra Sen; and the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj founded by dissenters from the Keshub Church. The Sadharan Samaj, led by Shivanath Sastri and Ananda Mohun Bose, gave a rational, monistic interpretation of the Upanisads, admitting the essential unity of the universal self and the individual self. The following doctrines, as noted in Renaissance of Hinduism are common to all these varieties and offshoots of the Brahmo Samaj:

1. They have no faith in any scripture as an authority.
2. They have no faith in Avatars.
3. They denounce polytheism and idol-worship.
4. They are against caste restrictions.
5. They make faith in the doctrines of Karma and Rebirth optional. Another offshoot of the Brahmo Samaj, the Prarthana Samaj was founded by Justice Ranade in Bombay. Its programme included disapproval of caste, recognition of widow marriage, and the encouragement of women's education. Dr. Atmaram Pandurang, Pandita Rama Bai, S. P. Kelkar and S. P. Pandit were the principal exponents of this Samaj.

The Arya Samaj

As a reaction against the influences typified by Raja Ramamohun Roy and Justice Ranade, the Arya Samaj was founded by Swami Dayanand Saraswati. It attacked the Brahmo Samaj for its pro-European and pro-Christian attitude. A great Sanskrit scholar and a believer in the doctrines of Karma and Rebirth, Swami Dayanand sought to revive the Vedic ideals and laid stress on Brahmacarya and Sannyasa. He believed implicitly in the ancient scriptures, disavowing Puranic Hinduism in favour of Vedic Hinduism. The Puranic texts, he said, had no Vedic sanction. Holding the Vedas alone as authoritative, he stated that God and the human soul are two distinct entities, different in nature and attributes, though they are inseparable from each other as the pervader and the pervaded. The doctrine of Karma and Samsara is of course accepted by the Arya Samaj. One of its main activities is Suddhi, a purification ceremony, by which non-Hindus are converted to Hinduism. The depressed classes and Harijans are entitled to be invested with the sacred thread and are given equal status with other Hindus. The Arya Samaj also reclaimed many Hindus who had been converted to Islam and Christianity. Sanghatan, organization of the Hindus for self-defence, is one of the main principles of the Arya Samaj, and it has played its part as the church militant in the Hindu fold.

The Theosophical Society

The Theosophical Society, founded in 1875 by Col. Olcott and Madame Blavatsky, co-operated with the Arya Samaj and tried fora time to organize lndian life on national lines and check the activities of Christian missionaries. Col. Olcott and Madame Blavatsky went later to Ceylon, declared themselves Buddhists, and took part in a movement for the revival of Buddhism. Dr. Annie Besant joined the Society after a period of militant agnosticism, side by side with notable social service, and political work amongst the Fabians in England. She became the head of the Theosophical Society in 1891. Claiming that she had been a Hindu in her former birth, Annie Besant worked throughout her life for the regeneration and activization of Hindu thought and Hindu life. She published a translation of the Bhagavad-Gita along with Dr. Bhagvan Das and popularized Hindu ideals in her numerous publications and marvellously eloquent speaches. A defender of many orthodox ideals, she turned later to social reform, which included the partial modification of the caste system. . One of thc main principles of Theosophy is the belief in a brotherhood of great teachers of the past

who are supposed to be living still, watching over and guiding the evolution of humanity. The Theosophical Society under Dr. Besant's guidance spread the fundamental principles of the Hindu religion - Karma, Reincarnation, Yoga and spiritual evolution.

Sri Ramakrishna and Vivekananda

Sri Ramakrishna Paramhamsa, a great devotee and mystic, had a broad outlook of universalism. After accepting the discipline of Yoga and Tantric Sadhana, he underwent the discipline of the Vaisnava, the Christian and the Islamic ways of life. To rouse the religious feelings of the wordly-minded and re-affirm the ancient truths of Hinduism by an appeal to experience, he trained a devoted band of followers, the most outstanding of whom was Narendranath, Swami Vivekananda. Sri Ramakrishna's teachings were neither new nor heterodox. As Swami Vivekananda said on one occasion, Ramakrishna brought old truths to light. He was an embodiment of the past religious thought of India. Like other great religious teachers of the world, he projected his ideas through parables or images. Questioned, for instance, on the problem of evil, Sri Ramakrishna said:" Evil exists in God as poison in a serpent. What is poison to us is not poison to the serpent. Evil is evil only from the point of view of man." In other words, from the absolute standpoint, there is no evil, but from the relative standpoint evil is a terrible reality. Ramakrishna preached that realization is the essence of religion - and that all religions are paths leading to the same goal. He deprecated metaphysical subtleties and insisted on deep devotion - it was, he said, through his intense devotion to the image of the Divine Mother in Dakshineswar that realization had come to him. Swami Vivekananda said:" If men like Sankara, Caitanya and Ramakrishna found image worship helpful, there is no sense in declining it."

Ramakrishna's religion and the movement he founded by gathering around him a band of devoted workers were essentially practical. This aspect was expounded and universalized by Swami Vivekananda. Under the inspiration of Ramakrishna, he changed from scepticism to religious realization and travelled all over the world, preaching the essence of the truths of Hinduism. He dedicated himself to the service of India and particularly to the service of those who were starving, depressed, or beyond the social pale. The work for the uplift of the Indian masses was for him as important as **meditation or Yoga.**

At the Parliament of Religions in Chicago, Swami Vivekananda struck a note of universal toleration based on the Hindu belief that all religions lead to the same God. He also declared in Chicago that the religion of the Hindus is centred on self-realizalion; idols, temples, churches and books are aids and nothing more. Swami Vivekananda strengthened the Ramakrishna organization by founding monasteries and centres of Hindu teaching in India and abroad. He reinterpreted Hinduism and stated that the abstract Advaita must become living. All through his life and especially during his travels abroad, he insisted that the essential features of Hinduism are its universality, its impersonality, its rationality, catholicity and optimism. Above all, its authority is not affected by the historicity of any particular man. Swami Vivekananda told his countrymen that they had become weak and miserable because they did not bring their Vedanta out of the books into life itself. His great contribution to Hinduism lay in applying the Hindu creed to the elevation of the masses and abolishing India's isolation from the world, culturally, spiritually, and in many aspects of social life. He founded a great and worldwide organization, the Ramakrishna Mission, which has worked for the spiritual welfare and multiform amelioration of the living conditions of the people of India and other countries.

Sri Aurobindo

Sri Aurobindo Ghosh, one of the latest exponents and interpreters of Hinduism, has described ancient Indian philosophy as follows: "an ingrained and dominant spirituality, an inexhaustible vital creativeness and gusto of life, and, mediating between them, a powerful, penetrating and scrupulous intelligence, combined with the rational ethical and aesthetic mind at a high intensity of action, created the harmony of the ancient Indian culture." Sri Aurobindo gave new interpretations of the Vedas and the Vedanta, and in his Essay on the Gita he expounded what he called 'the integral view of life." His great work, TheLife Divine, is a summing up of his philosophy of 'the Descent of the Divine into Matter." The importance of Sri Aurobindo's mission lies not only in his restatements of old ideals but also in his atternpt to explain the true methods of Yoga as apart from mere asceticism and illusionism.

Mahatma Gandhi

In the popularization of ancient Hindu ideals, Rabindranath Tagore and Mahatma Gandhi have played significant parts. Tagore has made a suggestive interpretation of the Vedic religion and the substance of the Upanisads. The teachings of Mahatma Gandhi have led to vast social changes and to the uplift of the backward and depressed classes. He has stated that his whole religion is based on a surrender to the will of God, the spirit of renunciation as embodied in the Isa Upanisad, the Gita and the ideals of practical service. He has given a new interpretation to the doctrine of non-violence which is as old as Hinduism, and tried to adapt it by means of satyagraha to political and moral issues.
Mahatma Gandhi worked for the uplift of the depressed and backward classes and for the creation of national entity. Speaking in Travancore on the Temple Entry Proclamation enacted there in 1936, he said: "These temples are the visible symbols of God's power and authority. They are, therefore, truly called the houses of God, .the houses of prayer. We go there in a prayerful mood and perform, first thing in thc morning after ablution, the act of dedication and surrender. Scoffers and sceptics may say that all these are figments of the imagination, that we are imagining God in the images we see. I will say to these scoffers that it is so. I am not ashamed of confessing that imagination is a powerful factor in life. Now you can easily understand that, in the presence of God, the Ruler of the Universe, who pervades everything, even those whom we have called the lowest of the low, all are equal." A recent example of transcendental spiritual experience manifested in life is Shri Ramana Maharishi, who passed away in 1950. A man of powerful personality, he taught as much by his silence as by his sermons. He had a directness of approach and a universality of outlook, which were products of true enlightenment.

The spirit of tolerance

It may be noted that the comprehensive tolerance of Hinduism is exemplified remarkably in such instances as the following. In the temple of *Dharmasthala in South Kerala the chief personage is a Jain - he is regarded as a hereditary oracle whose arbitration is sought by members of all Hindu and even Muslim communities. The temple itself has the Sivalinga as well as the Salagrama, or symbol of Visnu, the officiating priest being a Vaisnavite. In the shrine at Udipi the worship of Siva and Visnu alike is offered and the heads of the Udipi Math, although staunch Vaisnavites, are under the obligation to attend to two Siva shrines, in addition to officiating as the chief priests of the Krsna temple. It is believed that a person belonging to the Harijan community received special divine favour and attained union with God in the temple precincts. The tradition of Chidambaram is similar- the Paraya saint, Nandan, who was refused admission by the Brahmin priests, became the object of divine favour and attained communion with God. In the temple of Jagannath at Puri, caste distinctions have been discarded. In Travancore there is a forest temple dedicated to Ayyappa or Hariharaputra - here, too, no caste distinctions are observed. Hindus, and even Muslims and Christians, perform vows in this shrine with belief in the efficacy of the god's protective help. It may be noted in this context that the usual invocation of Ayyappa, namely, Saranam Ayyappa, is reminiscent of the Buddhist prayer.

- ***Dharmasthala' is not in south Kerala, as it has been mentioned in the text. It is in Karnataka, in Dakshina Kannada Distrit (suggested by Shri Harihareswara)***

The Spirit of Indian philosophy has been described in these words: "Its chief mark consists in concentration on the spiritual aspect, belief in the intimate relationship of philosophy and life, the inseparability of theory and practice and the insistence on intuition coexisting with the acceptance of authority." Finally, it is the synthetic vision of Indian philosophy which has made possible the intellectual and religious tolerance so pronounced in Indian thought throughout the ages. Recent squabbles between religious communities, born of political factionalism, are alien to the basic Indian mind and are indeed antagonistic to its unique genius for adaptability and tolerance.

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